

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, August 8th, 2012

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Sibyl James**

Today's poet is **Thomas H. Pruiksma**

Thomas H. Pruiksma is a writer, poet, translator, teacher, and magician, sometimes simultaneously. His translations of the 12th century Tamil poet, woman, and saint, Avvaiyar, Give, Eat, and Live, was published in 2009 by Red Hen Press. Other books include The Body and the Earth: Notes from a Conversation, coauthored with the south Indian artist C.F. John, and A Feast for the Tongue, written with Tamil scholar Dr. K. V. Ramakoti. He has received fellowships from the U.S. Fulbright Program, the American Literary Translators Association, The Ohio State University, Oberlin Shansi, and Oberlin College, and lives on Vashon Island with his partner, David Mielke. www.poetsmagic.com

Counsel

by Thomas H. Pruiksma

How do we build a city, a safe refuge
for many people, a place of many places
where many people want to dwell,

when the many may have many
ideas about the city, the people, and the places
the place might become?

So many that,
at times, it can tear them apart, pulling at
the fibers
till the fibers start to fray, till what
had felt whole and truthfully woven
begins to look ragged, and not just
around the edges, where the words that once carried
music in their meaning have ceased to carry
anything at all.

What then
can we do to bring it back together, to bind
the many pieces without pieces
feeling bound?

In ancient Tamil Nadu, "Land
of Tamil," the great kings of the kingdoms
held council with poets, learned men and women
who advised them in song, calling them
on their errors, praising them
for their hearts, teaching them
always the root of all art:
the courage to listen and then act.

Listen, listen, listen
to the people, to their pains
and their plans, and to the voice great
within us, rising up and rising out, showing us
the next step, the next way, the next word,

the next wonder that will make
the poem once again, piecing the many pieces
into more than just many, where everyone
is welcome, where everyone
is heard, where everyone finds shelter
in the shelter we make
from the words that weave us together.

-- *End* --